

## Greening of the Finnish food system

### – A case of organic production, environmentally friendly food and alternative forms of consumption

resting example of how such local self-reliance and local self-sufficiency could be institutionalized. It could be hypothesized that such structures allow consumers to have a relationship with a concrete farm that in turn facilitates them to see and understand the effects of their consumption patterns on the environment. It could thus be expected that short food supply chains have the capacity to re-link people to a specific environment. In themselves, short food supply chains could be thought of as institutional structures, which combine the social network of producers and consumers with economic activity. Short food supply chains thus have the capacity to facilitate adaptive management. Moreover, they have the capacity to strengthen global food security as they function as relatively autonomous entities. If something would happen to one of them, other systems are not necessarily profoundly affected.

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#### Litteratur

Vergunst, P. J. B., 2003. Liveability and ecological land use – the challenge of localisation. Doctoral dissertation. Department of Rural Development Studies, Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences. Agraria 373.

So-called green issues have been a part of the discourses of the environmental movement. The situation has changed, however, and the environmental movement no longer dominates the discourse on the environment. By greening, it is meant the processes by which environmental concerns are nurtured within social groups and modern environmentally related symbols become increasingly prominent in social discourse. In the context of this research, greening appears as a growing demand for the products with an environmental image, for example organic products. This is a short description of an ongoing Finnish research project about greening and food systems. As the data gathering is in progress at the moment, some preliminary results may be looked for at the end of this year. However, the timetable of the project is January 1<sup>st</sup> 2002 – December 31<sup>st</sup> 2005.

#### Focus on food systems

Food does not come to consumers' tables straight from the farms, rather, there is a whole food system located between production and consumption. Food system implies the relations between the production and consumption of foodstuffs that have become dietary standards. Production and processing of food have become as a focus of public debate and the question of food has politicised in a new way. Recent food scares (BSE, foot and mouth disease, for example) have increased consumers' interests in the origin of food and the conditions of production. Also the demand for food has been fragmented and diversified. Finnish



*The dualistic separation of nature and society is inappropriate for research on environmental questions and the food system. Foto. K. Ullvén*

people have frequent expressed their desire to eat food that is produced and processed in Finland. Along with the (at least rhetorical) greening of Finnish society, ecological and ethical values surrounding food have become important for consumers.

#### Nature and society

Research into agriculture and food, so-called agro-food studies, are criticised on placing too much emphasis upon economic issues and neglecting culture and social actors in the food system. Criticism has also been applied to modernist ontology and the dualistic separation of nature and society. In the modernist ontology of agricultural political economy and also rural sociology, agricultural

nature appears simply as an external, inorganic medium, acted upon and manipulated by human artifice. The modernist dichotomy of nature and society is seen to be disabling – methodologically and analytically as well as politically and ethically. The externalised, mechanistic conceptualisations of the non-human realm militate against conversations with environmental and other alternative movements. Food research only on production is inadequate for gaining and understanding of the social and cultural processes emerging and mediated through food. The same applies to research only on consumption. Instead, the whole food system should be studied.

The problem of solving the dualism between nature and society is an extended, central and unsolved problem in scientific research. In the last few years, it has received growing attention from different disciplines. Tight separation is not, however, a fruitful starting point for research on environmental and food issues. Latour (1993), for example, sees dualistic thinking unsuitable for research on environmental questions because environmental problems are hybrids: combinations of technology, nature and society.

### Objectives

Most of the recent agro-food studies have been relying on concepts developed in the North American or third world contexts. This study contributes by analyzing the European and especially North European experience. This may create some new insights for discussing such issues as the role of the small (or family based) food producers, the changing significance of state and regulation of the food system. Understanding the process of the greening of the food system demands a broad theoretical perspective, but it also calls for analysis of individual cases. In this research, the process of greening is analysed through social construction

of it. The research outlined has four general objectives:

- To recognise and analyse the contradictory process of greening in different parts of Finnish food system.
- To recognise the mechanisms and interactions through which the greening of food systems takes place.
- To analyse the role of the key social actors in the greening of the food system.
- To discuss the social relevance of the greening of food in comparative international perspective.

The research tackles greening of the food system from three perspectives: 1 Producer, 2. Industry and trade, and 3. Consumption. Specific research objectives of this research:

1. Organic production as a part of the greening of Finnish agriculture (Tuija Mononen)
2. Food industry, trade and the challenge of the greening of food (Tiina Silvasti)
3. Greening of food consumption: The case of catering firms and their customers (Maarit Sireni)

### Connecting the links of food system

Jettisoning culture is a serious limitation in understanding the development of the food system's reactions to the new challenges. Agro-food networks do not work in vacuum. Instead, they are tightly connected to the cultural environment. Thus, one of the aims of this study is to develop more environmentally and culturally sensitive methods for agro-food studies.

During the recent decade, Finland's food-market has opened to international competition. Internationalization has also introduced Finnish consumers to new environmental and ethical discourses about alternative food (organic, local/

regional, "slow-food" etc). Simultaneously, however, the Finns have become more aware of the strong continuities of their peasant and forest food cultures, discovering again the flavors of the local and the authentic. Thus the lunch and dinner tables in Finland are set with contradictory processes. Who are involved in these contradictory processes, and how are they involved? How do these contradictions evolve, and what is their significance? These questions will be answered in the final phase of our research.

More information about the project, data gathering methods and specific research objectives from:

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Tuija Mononen

### Literature

Latour, B. 1993. We have never been modern. New York, London. Harvester Wheatsheaf.